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ABSTRACT

Since the fall of 1957, the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station has published a semi-scientific quarterly magazine, "Louisiana Agriculture," to present information on the station's research to Louisiana citizens, particularly public officials, members of the agribusiness sector, science-oriented farmers, agriculture and science teachers, and libraries. Sent free to individuals who request it, total distribution grew to over 7,500 by 1987. To purge the mailing list and determine readers' occupations and subject interests, 5,169 cards/surveys were mailed with the Spring 1987 issue. Approximately 1,300 subscribers requested to remain on the mailing list and 1,200 responded to the questionnaire. Results indicated 789 respondents lived in Louisiana, 358 lived in other states, and 154 were foreign residents, universities, or libraries. Approximately 61% of Louisiana and 17% of nonresident respondents were farmers and agribusiness owners/operators, 27% were academic professionals, 31% were high school classrooms. Of the Louisiana respondents, 52% read all or most of the articles, 65% preferred articles that give general information on a subject, and 52% of teachers/researchers preferred technical information about research projects. In order of preference, top ranking subjects were beef cattle, wildlife management, vegetables, plant diseases and pests, catfish/crawfish, environmental protection, fruit crops, economics, forestry, machinery, animal diseases and pests. (NEC)

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READERSHIP STUDY OF AN AGRICULTURAL MAGAZINE

By

Ted Holmes

February 1988

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READERSHIP STUDY OF AN AGRICULTURAL MAGAZINE

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The Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station established Louisiana Agriculture in the fall of 1957 as a semi-scientific quarterly magazine to present information on the station's research to Louisiana citizens, particularly public officials, members of the agribusiness sector and science-oriented farmers. It was also sent to high school vocational agriculture teachers, science teachers and libraries, to LAES faculty and staff members, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service specialists and parish offices, and experiment station and agricultural extension directors and agricultural libraries throughout the U.S. land grant university system.

Until mid-1987, no systematic purge of the mailing list was ever attempted. The magazine is sent free to individuals who request it so through it's 30 years, hundreds of names were added. Total distribution had grown to more than 7,500 copies.

With the Spring 1987 issue a card was attached for subscribers to request continuation of their subscriptions. To provide information about the readers of the magazine and their interests, a questionnaire was printed on the card. Readers were informed that they must place postage on the card and return it to continue receiving the magazine, and their response to the questionnaire would be appreciated but was not required.

The card was attached to 5,169 copies--3,583 going to Louisiana residents, 1,094 to other U.S. addresses (including 143 to libraries and

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Summary of remarks presented in the Agricultural Communication Section, Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, New Orleans, LA., February 2, 1988.

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land grant universities) and 492 to foreign addresses. Not surveyed were LSU faculty, high school libraries and science and vocational agriculture teachers, and public officials.

Approximately 1,300 subscribers returned cards requesting to remain on the mailing list. About 100 of these chose to not respond to the questionnaire. Many respondents gave more than one response to each question. Responses were tabulated by occupational interests, occupational interests compared with place of residence, and reading practices, preferences for type of article and subject interests compared with occupation.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Survey results were combined with a count of addresses in categories not surveyed to give the following occupational profile of the total readership:

--At least 15% are farmers and agribusiness owners or operators.

--About 27% are in academic professions (teachers/scientists).

--4% are public officials.

--31% of the circulation goes into high school classrooms.

Of all of the respondents to the survey:

--789 live in Louisiana.

--358 are in other states.

--154 are foreign residents, universities or libraries.

At least 61% of the Louisiana respondents are engaged in farming or agribusiness. Only about 17% of the nonresident respondents were in these occupations.

Before the address list was purged, 79% of the addressees were Louisiana residents. After the purge, 86% of the copies are remaining in Louisiana.

Of the Louisiana respondents:

--52% said they read all or most of the articles

--Parttime farmers seem to be the most avid readers--62% said they read all or most articles--but fulltime farmers were close behind with 59% reading all or most.

--Teachers and researchers and "Others" were most likely to file articles for later reference, although about a third of those in other occupations also said they do. "Others" include a number of parish libraries and writers and editors.

--Of all Louisiana respondents, 65% said they prefer articles that give general information on a subject. Some said they like both general and technical articles.

--52% of the teachers and researchers prefer articles that give technical information about research projects.

Following are the top ranking subject preferences, listed in order of preference, of the Louisiana respondents:

All respondents--Beef cattle, wildlife management, vegetables, plant diseases and pests, catfish and crawfish, environmental protection, fruit crops, economics, forestry, machinery, animal diseases and pests.

Fulltime farmers--Machinery, beef cattle, economics, plant diseases and pests, wildlife management, catfish/crawfish, animal diseases and pests, vegetables, and environmental protection.

Parttime farmers--Beef cattle, vegetables, wildlife management, fruit crops, plant diseases and pests, animal diseases and pests, catfish and crawfish, and forestry.

Agribusiness owners/operators--Catfish/crawfish, wildlife management, beef cattle, economics, soybeans, vegetables, environmental protection, and plant diseases and pests.

Teachers and researchers--Vegetables, environmental protection, plant diseases and pests, wildlife management, fruit crops, catfish and crawfish, soybeans, beef cattle, forestry, economics.

Other occupations--Wildlife management, vegetables, catfish and crawfish, plant diseases and pests, environmental protection, beef cattle, fruit crops.

Students--Environmental protection, wildlife management.

The teachers and researchers and those in the "Others" category showed the most even distribution of interest in a large number of subjects. The most marked high point in interest was that of parttime farmers who want information on beef cattle.

CONCLUSIONS

Several observations about the survey might be considered in planning the future of the magazine:

1. Considering the distribution patterns and the reported levels of reading interest, Louisiana Agriculture appears to serve a creditable number of Louisiana citizens who currently have or might in the future have a professional interest in agriculture or agribusiness. It is potentially a very effective vehicle for conveying information on the scientific bases for modern agriculture and for getting young people interested in careers in the agricultural sciences.

2. The teacher/researcher group appears to differ somewhat from the other readers in their interests and reading practices. It's not surprising that many of these readers would like for the magazine to follow the style of a scientific journal. The fact that they comprise about 27

percent of the magazine's recipients, however, means that some 73 percent are not in this group.

3. The prevalent interest in generalized articles should be considered in planning for the future style of the magazine.

4. Almost a third of the present circulation is going to schools and students. If the magazine is to be sent to this many young people, writers and editors should work toward simplification of the style to be attractive to these readers. Further study could determine whether or how the magazines are being used in the schools and how their use might potentially be improved.

5. While the responses regarding subject interests might be affected to some degree by "fad" interests, they should for the most be taken seriously. A repeat of the survey periodically, possibly with some modification, might be useful in the selection of articles.